



BIG CYPRESS — The Ahfachkee School will undergo a massive expansion next year with the addition of a new middle and high school building. The two-story 30,000-square foot structure will be built on the site formerly home to a cluster of portable classrooms west of the school’s existing classroom building.



Council approved the expansion Dec. 14 and hired Pirtle Construction, a firm that specializes in school construction, for the job. The expansion will be done in two phases beginning in Feb. 2018. The first phase will be the new building; the second is the renovation of the existing classroom buildings the following year.

“The Ahfachkee School is like a tool to help educate your community,” said Big Cypress Councilman Mondo Tiger. “I’m emphasizing school so when students graduate, they can go beyond that to help the community. I’m hoping this is just the beginning. If you have the right school and teaching, anyone can be successful.”

Construction on the middle and high school building should take 11 months. It will contain a new cafeteria, an art studio and a media center with a large computer area. Four high school and three middle school classrooms are on the second floor along with labs including science, bio med, MakerBot 3-D printing, media and TV production.

The school is designed for the 21st Century learning curriculum, which emphasizes group projects guided by teachers in which students work and learn together. The objective of 21st Century learning is to prepare students to be active, successful and contributing members of society. Experts believe collaboration, digital literacy, critical thinking and problem solving are skills every student needs.

Ahfachkee’s new layout includes spacious indoor areas outside of the classrooms for collaborative work. An abundance of large windows will bring in natural light and interior glass walls in the classrooms will make the school cheerful and bright. Additionally, it will allow teachers to observe students in the collaboration areas.

Principal Dorothy Cain believes the new building design will benefit the students by engaging them as they learn. Cain recently met with the Bureau of Indian Education at the school.

“Many of the BIE’s new schools have those collaborative areas,” Cain said. “They were pleased to see our school will also have those areas and are with us 100 percent.”

After the new building is complete, the existing building will be renovated and include the administration office and pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade classrooms. The primary grades, K-5, will also have collaboration areas. The existing science classroom building will be repurposed for the Culture Department. Culture’s chickees and gardens will remain where they are.

Project manager Fred Barrios anticipates the entire project will be complete by October 2019.

“It’s going to look beautiful,” said Barrios, of the Construction Management Department. “Council is excited, everyone is excited.”

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